

# THE ISSUE OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE THIRD WORLD: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

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## INTRODUCTION

The issue of political leadership and the desire to produce men and women who command national legitimacy has been tough in all polities—and this dilemma is probably more critical in the developing nations.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the assumption is that a good leader possesses some significant attributes—qualities that are bestowed on the actor by the milieu in which leadership is demonstrated. Nevertheless, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a former Secretary-General of the United Nations, contended that leadership cannot be visualized only within the context of individuals and their decision to act in moments of conflict and inferred that leadership as a quality “may be more innate than acquired.”<sup>2</sup> He then enumerated the following features as conducive to leadership characteristics: 1. Vision; 2. Eloquence; 3. Cooperative spirit; 4. Courage; and 5. Political intuition.

In general having a clear vision suggests that in order for a leader to lead effectively she or he must comprehend the nature of the society in which leadership role is to be performed. Thus, in order to construct a society that advances democracy, development and human rights, for example, a ruler must be able to articulate such a vision with eloquence in “Churchillian, Reaganesque and Castroan” oratorical skill, in a manner of expression. Possessing an adequate idea as to how a society is to be effectively governed and eloquence to galvanize various competing publics to action are important and useful variables only to the extent that the leader works in a cooperative spirit with the immediate elite and followers. This supposition is fundamentally significant because leadership cannot be demonstrated in a vacuum. Leaders’ inability and sometimes deliberate attempt not to connect with followers at the grassroots has solidified the doctrine of “the iron law of oligarchy” at the top level of the state system in developing nations with disastrous consequences for many citizens. Courage and political intuition imply that a leader may have to, from time to time, take or make decisions that work against corporate and elite interests in order to maximize the interest of the system as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

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Undeniably, political intuition as one of the tools in the arsenal and repertoire of a good leader is so invaluable that Boutros-Ghali contended that "it is the *"summum bonum* of the leadership qualities."<sup>4</sup>

Speaking on "Democracy and Leadership challenges in Latin America" the former Brazilian President Fernando H. Cardoso alluded to the antinomy between facts and values, practice and theory, technical knowledge and political decision in the leadership calculus in any society, and posed the salient query: what balance between these roles should be struck for a ruler to be successful? He further opined:

Some may argue that there is no need for accommodation or compromise; politicians should simply abide by an ethic of responsibility and follow what they believe to be the most sensible and politically rewarding course, regardless of any technical consideration. I am afraid that today's world does not allow for such a facile situation. Be it in the developed or in the developing world, politicians, once in office, are supposed to respond to an increasingly wide range of societal interests [that are often clashing]...<sup>5</sup>

Writing on "Leadership for the Twenty-first century, learning from the Past," John Mukum Mbaku notes with lucidity that only fundamental measures and profound changes in leadership and its character can arrest the collapsing economic infrastructures and social conditions in the [developing nations]. Such a change could create the enabling environment for important improvements in the living standards of the masses...<sup>6</sup>

Overall, the thrust of this address flows from the following: 1. Definitional and conceptual overview of leadership. 2. Concise theories of leadership. 3. Modalities and instrumentalities for promoting effective leadership—particularly political leadership in the Third World.

### **DEFINITIONAL AND CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP**

In the words of Robert Elgie "leadership is an abstraction... It is a social science concept...and a concept whose meaning is socially constructed...[thus], is an essentially contested concept...whose problematic meaning and explication is similar to those of power, influence, authority and control."<sup>7</sup> Leadership as an "intangible" variable of power, in all regions of the world, is a very perplexing concept. Yet, it is a critical quality necessary for the successful management of a society and its institutions. Indeed, many scholars have contended that, in so far as the Third World nations continue to elect,

select or appoint ineffective and selfish leaders, the issue of bad governance and its associated problems of political instability, social malaise, corruption, lack of accountability and transparency, and the respect for the rule of law will persist in the developing nations.<sup>8</sup>

The definitions of (political) leadership are overwhelming but the following will suffice for the purpose of illustration and amplification:

- [T]he behavior of persons in positions of political authority, their competitors and those both in interaction with other members of society as manifested in the past, present, and probable future throughout the world.<sup>9</sup>
- Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers.<sup>10</sup>
- Leadership is a process of human interaction in which some individuals exert, or attempt to exert, a determining influence upon others.<sup>11</sup>
- [P]olitical leadership is the mobilization and direction, by a person or persons using essentially non-coercive means, on other persons within a society to act in patterned and coherent ways that cause (or prevent) change in the authoritative allocation of values within that society.<sup>12</sup>
- Leadership is the process by which one individual consistently exerts more impact than others on the nature and direction of group authority.<sup>13</sup>
- [I]t seems possible to define political leadership...as the power exercised by one or a few individuals to direct members of the nation towards actions.<sup>14</sup>
- Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their purpose.<sup>15</sup>
- [Leaders] are persons who exercise control over the behavior of others so as to move them in a desired direction...<sup>16</sup>

If there is an imputation that is peculiar to these definitions and explications of leadership attributes, it is that the nature and character of leadership (whether innate or learned) is puzzling. Further, the ability of a leader to influence others to accede to his or her ideologies, views and policies, cannot be separated from the unique composition of the society (based on cultural specificity and historicity) in which the leader endeavors to illustrate leadership features.<sup>17</sup> And the variables that tend to influence and explain an

individual's leadership genre could be contextualized and clarified within some theoretical models.

### CONCISE THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

Contextually and circumstantially earlier scholarships on leadership as, for example, those of the German sociologist and economist Max Weber, devoted tremendous efforts in attempts to unlock the secrets of personal traits that might make a "man" an efficacious leader.<sup>18</sup> This conceptual focus is regarded in the realm of leadership studies as "The Great-Man Theory." This androcentric analysis of the leadership genre in society has, of course, been deemphasized in later studies by scholars who assert, *inter alia*, that there have been great women leaders, too.<sup>19</sup>

Be that as it may, it is axiomatic that there exist many theories—some of which are conflicting on leadership discourses. Put another way, the preponderance of theories suggests how intricate it is for scholars to explain successfully the complex web of suppositions on leadership. Nevertheless, the following extremely brief explanations on the principles of leadership are developed from an impressive seminal work of Jerome Adams and Janice D. Yoder<sup>20</sup> and augmented with analyses from other sources.<sup>21</sup> These leadership conjectures are trait, situation, contingency and transactional.<sup>22</sup>

#### Trait Theory

This theory refers to the idiosyncratic attributes of the leader. In this framework, it is suggested that leadership and the quality of leadership itself is inherent in the personality trait or what Harold Lasswell termed character structure.<sup>23</sup> In this conjecture, Leadership skill may be considered to be probably innate.<sup>24</sup>

#### Situation Theory

In the eye of C. Sherif and M. Sherif, leaders are role players, and the leadership style depends on the situation in which actors find themselves.<sup>25</sup> Roles contend Edwin P. Hollander, are the expected behavior of those who occupy a position of leadership.<sup>26</sup> For Adams and Yoder, roles do not exist within individuals as traits do; roles arise from the social context in which they take place.<sup>27</sup> Leadership role is neither dormant nor static but changes circumstantially. Moreover, the character of leadership may differ among collectivities and with a specific organization over time.

## **Contingency Theory**

Contingency theory explains a leadership genre that represents a blend or synthesis of trait and situation theories. It supposes that leadership emanates or results from the right mix of situational favorability and leadership trait. In this regard, it is argued that what is central to effective leadership is the extent to which leaders' trait and the properties of the situation in which they find themselves are well synchronized.<sup>28</sup> An adequate match or synchronism of these factors in an individual's outlook could lead to the emergence of an effective leader.

## **Transactional Theory**

Transactional view of leadership emphasizes a rather reciprocal or symbiotic relationship between the leader and follower within an organismic state—i.e., a polity in which the sub-national units function together, but in which the amalgamated entities or whole is presumed to be greater than the micro units.<sup>29</sup> In truth, leaders within such an organismic entity or what I termed nucleo-cytoplasmic state<sup>30</sup> may function effectively through symbiosis with followers and various sub-national groups in order to agglutinate the collectivities within the nation-state.

Adams and Yoder contend that transactional leadership reflects "the mutual influence of leaders and followers. ...Leadership [in this context] is reflective of social exchange for a favorable balance of rewards and cost for themselves."<sup>31</sup> Thus, transactional theory is rooted in the theory of social exchange.

In all, though, theoretical idealism and political realism are often contradictory in their application in many societies—especially in developing or Third World countries with low level of education and unstable political systems at this juncture. However, theories tend to be important and useful tools for explaining leadership genre in politically advanced polities with extremely high levels of education and development.

## **MODALITIES AND INSTRUMENTALITIES FOR PROMOTING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

Since (political) leadership issue has been problematic in virtually all societies and particularly more so in the developing nations, the question, therefore, is: what is to be done? The following discussions on how to improve the quality of leadership in the Third World are drawn in part from Robert I. Rotberg's book, *Progress and Problems of Governance and Leadership in*

*Africa*. Specifically, the volume draws upon two important related documents, viz. The Mombasa Declaration and the Code of African Leadership of March 20, 2004.

The Mombasa Manifesto proclaims:

Good leaders globally guide governments of nation-states to perform effectively for their citizens. They deliver high security for the state and the person; a functioning rule of law; education; health; and a framework conducive to economic growth. They ensure effective arteries of commerce and enshrine personal and human freedoms. They empower civil society and protect the environmental commons. Crucially, good leaders also provide their citizens with a sense of belonging to a national enterprise of which everyone can be proud. They knit rather than unravel their nations and seek to be remembered for how they have bettered the real lives of the governed rather than the fortunes of the few.<sup>32</sup>

If the above enumerated attributes are essential elements that a positive leader in a society should imbibe, what are some of the behavioral characteristics that good leaders should eschew? The Declaration noted, *inter alia*, the following:

Less benevolent, even malevolent, leaders deliver far less by way of performance. Under their stewardship, roads fall into disrepair, currencies depreciate and real prices inflate, health services weaken, life expectancies slump, people go hungry, schooling standards fall, civil society becomes more beleaguered, the quest for personal and national prosperity slows, crime rates accelerate, and overall security becomes more tenuous. Corruption grows. Funds flow out of the country into hidden bank accounts. Discrimination against minorities (and occasionally majorities) becomes prevalent. Civil wars begin...<sup>33</sup>

In order to give substance to the proclamation, a special Code of Leadership was promulgated. This Code, among other factors, affirms emphatically that African leaders and *a priori* Third World leaders serve their peoples and their nations best when:

- They offer a coherent vision of individual growth and national advancement with justice and dignity for all...

- They encourage broad participation of all levels of society, including all minorities and majorities, and emphasize the deliberative nature of the best democratic practices.
- They demonstrate in their professional and personal lives deep respect for the letter and the spirit of the provisions of the national constitution, including strictly abiding by Term Limits.
- They lead by example and teach to acquaint their peoples with respect for dissent, the ideas of others, and the importance of disagreement between political parties and individuals.
- They respect international conventions and international laws.
- They promote transparency and encourage and adhere to internationally common forms of accountability.
- They recognize that they are accountable for their actions and that no one is above the law nationally and internationally.
- They promote policies aimed at eradicating poverty and ...respect all human rights and civil liberties.
- They demand and work for the peaceful and lawful transfer of power and promote and respect the separation of powers by ensuring financial autonomy of the judiciary and parliament, and ensure that the judiciary and parliament are free from unlawful interference by the executive...
- They adhere to a strong code of ethics and demand the same from all subordinate officials and cabinet ministries.
- They do not use their office for personal gain and avoid (or declare) all conflicts of interest; they declare their personal and immediate family assets yearly.
- They specifically eschew corrupt practices and expose those in their official capacities that violate national laws...
- They ensure human security and respect freedom of religion, the press, media, assembly and expression.<sup>34</sup>

I contend that the Declaration and the Code of Leadership could be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to other Third World regions. In short, the logic and usefulness of the declaration and code are mondial, but most appropriate to developing nations.

Moreover, given the multi-ethnic character of the nation-state in much of the Third World, it might be necessary for political leaders to heed the wise counsel of Donald Rothchild regarding the amelioration of conflict by encouraging some measure of ethnic balance or consociationalism in the composition of the national/regional cabinet. Indeed, he offered the following recommendations:

1. The inclusion of major ethno-regional representatives in the cabinet and/or party national executive committee.
2. The preservation, when succession occurs, of a geographical balance in appointments to the president and prime minister as well as in the cabinet and [political] party.
3. [The adoption of] special measures to include minority ethnic interests in the decision-making process...<sup>35</sup>

The assumption is that when the above recommended strategies are not implemented by political leaders centrifugal forces could be unleashed if the dominant groups use their numerical strength and clout to subjugate and suppress minority groups and their interests in the system. On the other hand, if the dominant groups and chiefs are politically magnanimous in sharing power with minority groups by applying the policy of inclusion that could promote centripetal tendencies in the polity and advance political and social stability.<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, the leadership issue—especially political leadership problem—will likely remain the fundamental obstacle undermining the development enterprise in the Third World in the beginning of the millennium. It would, therefore, behoove us as serious scholars concerned with Third World under/development to direct our research with greater vigor and rigor to this question in order to assist these trustees of government to rule their society in a manner that could promote development, encourage peaceful coexistence, and advance political stability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## NOTES

1. E. Ike Udogu, "Political Leadership and Governance in Democratic Nigeria," *Africa Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2000): 113. See also Robert I. Rotberg, "The Leadership Factor: The Political Dimensions of Africa's Economic Development," *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1998): 72
2. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Leadership and Conflict," in *Essays on Leadership: Cornegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict* (New York: Cornegie Corporation of New York, 1998), p. 2.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-6
4. *Ibid.* p. 5
5. Address by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso at the Inter-American Dialogue Conference on "Democracy and Leadership



- Challenges in Latin America" Washington, DC (December 18, 2003), p. 1 <http://www.thedialogue.org/publications/programs/policy/politics>
6. John Mukum Mbaku, "Leadership for the Twenty-First Century, Learning from the Past," in A. B. Assensoh, *African Political Leaders: Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere* (Malabu, FL: Krieger Publishing Company 1998), p. vii.
  7. Robert Elgie, *Political Leadership in Liberal Democracies* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1995), pp. 2-3.
  8. E. Ike Udogu, "Political Leadership and Governance in Democratic Nigeria," pp. 116-120.
  9. Glenn D. Paige, *The Scientific Study of Political Leadership* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), p. 1.
  10. James Macgregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 18.
  11. Robert C. Tucker, *Politics as Leadership* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1981), p. 11.
  12. Chong-Do Hah and Frederick C. Bartol, "Political Leadership as a Causative Phenomenon: Some Recent Analyses," *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (October 1983): 119-120.
  13. Barbara Kellerman "Leadership as a Political Act,": in Barbara Kellerman (ed.), *Leadership: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), p. 70.
  14. Jean Blondel, *Political Leadership: Towards a General Analysis* (London: Sage Publishers 1987), p. 3.
  15. Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Praeger, 1991), p. 102.
  16. Lewis Edinger, "A Preface to the Study in Political Leadership," in Gabriel Sheffer (ed.), *Innovative Leadership in International Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 6. See also Elgie, "Political Leadership in Liberal Democracies," p. 3.
  17. Udogu, "Political Leadership and Governance in Democratic Nigeria," p. 115.
  18. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958). Indeed, Weber investigated the issue of authority, status, and legitimacy. He posited three types of leadership styles: 1. charismatic; 2. traditional; 3. rational-legal. As societies metamorphosed, they would advance from the first type through the second and eventually achieve the third type, which he construed as typical in "modern society."

19. Edgar F. Borgatta, Robert F. Bales, and Arthur S. Couch, "Some findings Relevant to the Great Man Theory of Leadership," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 19 (December 1954): 755-759
20. Jerome Adams and Janince D. Yoder. *Effective Leadership for Women and Men* (Norward, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985).
21. Udogu, "Political Leadership and Governance in Democratic Nigeria," pp. 116-120.
22. Adams and Yoder, *Effective Leadership for Women and Men*, pp. 1-34.
23. Cited in L. G. Seligman, "The Study of Leadership," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1950), p. 911.
24. E. Ike Udogu, *Nigeria and the Politics of Survival as a Nation-state* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), p. 154.
25. M. Sherif and C. Sherif, *An Outline of Social Psychology* (New York: Harper, 1956), pp. 119-140.
26. E. P. Hollander, *Principles and Methods of Social Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 213-222.
27. Adams and Yoder, *Effective Leadership for Women and Men*, pp. 11-16
28. *Ibid.*, p. 16
29. D. Searing, "Models and Images on Man and Society in Leadership Theory," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1969): 3-31.
30. E. Ike Udogu, "National Integration Attempts in Nigerian Politics 1979-1984," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, Vol. 17, No. 1-2 (1990): 166.
31. Adams and Yoder, *Effective Leadership for Women and Men*, p. 27
32. The Mombasa Declaration of 20 March 2004. <http://www.Google.com/Search?hl=the+Mombasa+Declaration&btnG=Google+Search> Also reproduced in Robert I. Rotberg, *Africa: Progress and Problems of Governance and Leadership in Africa* (Philadelphia, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2007), p. 34. See K. Morrell and J. Hartley, "A Model of Political Leadership," *Human Relations*, Vol 59, No. 4 (2006): 483-504.
33. *Ibid.* The Declaration that was signed by: H. E. Sir Ketumile Masire, H. E. General Yakubu Gowon, Hon. E. Moody Awori, Hon. Peter Ayang'Nyong'o, Hon. Hage Geingob, Hon James Jonah, and Hon. Abdulrahman Kinana further noted:

It is easy in theory and practice to distinguish among good, less good, bad, and disappointing leaders everywhere. Positive leaders in Africa stand out because of their adherence to participatory democratic principles and their clear-minded strength of character.

Transformational leaders improve the lives of their followers and make those followers proud of being a part of a new vision. Good leaders produce results, whether in terms of enhanced standards of living, basic development indicators abundant new sources of personal opportunity, enriched schooling, skilled medical care, freedom from crime, or strengthened infrastructures. Bad and dangerous leaders tear down the social and economic fabric of the countries; they immiserate their increasingly down-trodden citizens. Despotic rulers, particularly, oppress their own fellow nationals, depriving them of liberty, prosperity, and happiness...

We assert that good leadership can flourish on the African continent. In order to strengthen the prospect of good leadership we have produced a detailed Code of African Leadership. It specifies the contours of good leadership. We want it to the [23] commandments of leadership, and we ask the African Union, our national continental leaders, and civil society to take note and expect each of the commandments to be fulfilled by our heads of state, heads of government, and other high-level officials...

34. Code of African Leadership, Mombasa, 20 March 2004. <http://www.worldpeacefoundation.org/ALC.Code%20of%20African%20leadership>.
35. Donald Rothchild, "State-Ethnic Relations in Middle Africa," in Gwendolen M. Carter and Patrick O'Meara (eds.), *African Independence: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1985), p. 82.
36. E. Ike Udogu, "Ethnicity and Theory in African Politics," in E. Ike Udogu (ed.), *The Issue of Political Ethnicity in Africa* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 13-34; E. Ike Udogu, *African Renaissance in the Millennium: The Political, Social and Economic Discourses on the Way Forward* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 42.

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